



# Tip Sheet 4: How to Use Compost

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## Why should you use compost at home?

Composting is more than a biological process; it's a way to improve the health of your lawn, plants, and garden, save money by reducing the need to purchase commercial fertilizers, and help the environment.

## Using compost:

- Adds most of the nutrients needed for healthy plant and lawn growth, releasing them slowly over time. It's nature's fertilizer!
- Improves the soil by allowing moisture to soak deeper into the ground.
- Promotes better root growth, allowing plants to survive periods of extreme weather conditions, such as droughts and high temperatures.
- Suppresses plant diseases.



## When is the compost ready?

Your compost is ready to use when it's crumbly, sweet-smelling, and has turned a rich, dark brown or black color. How do you know if your compost is ready to use? Place a small amount of compost in a sealed plastic bag, open it up in 3 days and smell it. If there are any strong ammonia odors, your compost isn't ready to use yet. Check the compost again in one week.

Using "unfinished" or immature compost that contains food scraps can attract pests and can cause harm to young plants, so make sure your compost has fully decomposed before use it.



## Add Compost to Your Garden Soil as a Soil Amendment

Spread about three inches of finished compost on your garden and then mix it into the top six inches of soil.



## Use Your Compost as a Top-Dressing on Your Lawn

In the fall, aerate your lawn and apply a quarter-inch layer of compost. Adding compost to your turf will improve the health of your lawn.



## Give Your Trees and Shrubs Some Compost

Apply compost to the soil around trees and shrubs. Push back any mulch and spread 1-2 inches of compost under the tree or shrub, making sure to keep the compost away from the trunk. Then replace the mulch on top. Do not place compost or mulch directly against the bark of any tree or shrub.



## Make Your Own Potting Soil Mix

Mix equal parts of compost, sand, and soil, then voila! You have your very own potting soil. Never plant directly into 100% compost; this might harm your plants because of its high concentration of nutrients.



## For More Information

[MontgomeryCountyMD.gov/RecycleRight](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/RecycleRight) | 311 or 240-777-0311



Montgomery County, Maryland  
Department of Environmental Protection  
Recycling and Resource Management Division  
Waste Reduction and Recycling Section  
2425 Reedie Drive, 4th Floor, Wheaton, Maryland 20902